LEVEL 1 - 21 OF 55 STORIES

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HEADLINE: Smoking Becomes 'Deviant Behavior'

BYLINE: By LAURA MANSNERUS

BODY:

It was cause for a libel award when a Chicago television commentator said in 1981 that the Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corporation was trying to snare teen-agers with advertisements relating smoking to drugs, alcohol and sex. The idea, the commentator had said, was to present cigarettes as ''an illicit pleasure.''

Whether the industry meant to send the message or not, illicit is what cigarettes have become.

''Smoking is quickly becoming a deviant behavior,'' said Barry Glassner, a sociology professor at Hunter College and Syracuse University. ''It's not just seen as something that's unhealthy or irrational.''

The recent pace of regulation has surprised even the antismoking organizations.

According to Action on Smoking and Health, an advocacy group, 23 states restrict smoking in restaurants, up from 14 a year ago, and 15 have regulations for private workplaces, up from 10 a year ago. More than half of American companies restrict smoking on the job. There are hundreds of municipal ordinances. New York's, which took effect April 6, is fairly typical of the new ones; it bans smoking in most enclosed public places and segregates smokers in restaurants and workplaces. As of yesterday, the Federal Aviation Administration prohibits smoking on flights of two hours or less, and Northwest Airlines forbids smoking on all its North American flights.

There are less official signs of disapproval, too. Corporate annual reports never picture the executives with cigarettes anymore, one consultant noted. The cover of this month's Reader's Digest asks, ''Is Smoking Ruining Your Sex Life?''

''In the last two years we've made more progress than in the previous 30,'' said Robert A. Rosner, executive director of the Smoking Policy Institute in Seattle, a nonprofit group that advises employers. The reason given most frequently for the change is new data on passive smoking, described in a 1986 Surgeon General's report and in another 1986 report by the National Research Council, which estimated that ambient smoke might cause 2,400 lung cancer deaths annually among nonsmokers.

''The one humongous issue is that the average person can justify harming themselves, but can't justify harming somebody else,'' Mr. Rosner said.

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Some sociologists see something more complicated at work. Professor Glassner, the author of a forthcoming book on attitudes about fitness and health, finds a ''craving for control'' reflected in all kinds of worries about the body.

''There are so many dangers that are large scale and that we feel we have no control over, particularly in the environment, that this is a way to gain control,'' he said.

Peter L. Berger, a Boston University sociologist, calls the New York ordinance a ''viable democratic compromise'' but casts the controversy in terms of class. ''It's not surprising that the upper-middle-class agenda has been successful,'' he said, adding that the wave of regulation is a ''delightfully close rerun of Prohibition.''

While hesitating to judge the evidence on passive smoking, he said it appeared to be ''much, much weaker'' than that on active smoking. ''The reason it's become so important,'' he said, ''is not because of the weight of the evidence but because of the ideological usefulness of the idea.''

''Most people are not in a position to evaluate this evidence. What people believe comes from placing faith in a certain authority. People say, 'The Surgeon General said so.' Well, who's the Surgeon General?''

Professor Glassner, who noted that he ''hates'' smoke, said, ''There is a cost involved in smoking bans. You're taking away a group's prerogatives. This is a country in which we value individual freedoms, and we ought to be extremely careful about which ones we take away.''

A libertarian strain persists even among nonsmokers. Dave Brenton, president of the Smoker's Rights Alliance of Mesa, Ariz., said about 20 percent of the group's 700 to 800 members are nonsmokers. ''They understand that it's an individual rights issue,'' he said. ''Who knows what they'll take away tomorrow?''

But Mr. Rosner said most restrictions do not keep smokers from maintaining their habit. ''My term for this is '80's-style temperance,'' he said. ''Smoke all you want - just don't do it in public places.''

Indeed, anti-tobacco forces have known fiercer days. In early New England, blue laws penalized public smoking. Prohibition revived the sentiment; between 1920 and 1930, even as per capita consumption doubled, several states prohibited the sale of tobacco.

Respectability came with World War II, when cigarettes were included with K-rations, and it was not until the mid-1960's - the first Surgeon General's report on smoking was issued in 1964 - that the decline began. In 1966, according to the Federal Centers for Disease Control, 42.2 percent of the American population smoked; in 1986, 26.5 percent did.

After the 1964 report, popular images of smoking changed, too. Cigarette ads were purged from the airwaves, ''Thank You for Not Smoking'' signs appeared, and Humphrey Bogart and John Wayne died of lung cancer.

Smoking, Education and Income

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Clearly, the message has had the greatest effect among the upper-middle class. There is a strong negative correlation between smoking and income and education, though not much difference by race: According to the Centers for Disease Control, 28.4 percent of blacks and 26.4 percent of whites are smokers.

In the current climate, smokers have been generally compliant. John M. Pinney, executive director of the Institute for the Study of Smoking Behavior and Policy at Harvard University, said its surveys of attitudes about the Cambridge, Mass., ordinance showed very little desire for confrontation.

''We're a very individual-minded nation in many ways,'' he said, ''but we also tend to seek permission for the things we want to do.''

Most experts do not predict the eradication of smoking, not even in public places, but expect it to become less and less acceptable. ''If this pattern continues,'' said Professor Glassner, ''we'll have a homogenized population in which everybody will be within the recommended weight ranges, and nobody will smoke anymore, and nobody will drink, and everybody will work out.''

''As I say this,'' he added, ''I realize some people think this would be an ideal society.''

AMERICA's SMOKERS
By education and income (1987)
(percentage who say they smoke) Education Not high school graduates 32%
High school graduates 33 Some college 29 Four-year college graduates 18
Household income $7,500 or less 32% $7,501-$15,000 38 $15,001-$25,000 31 $25,001-$35,000 27 $35,001-$50,000 23 $50,001 and over 23

(Source: Louis Harris survey for Prevention Magazine)

BY AGE, SEX AND RACE (1986)
(percentage who say they smoke)

MEN

Age	White	Black	Total
17-24	26.0%	14.3%	24.4%
25-34	32.4	45.9	33.6
35-44	37.4	36.4	37.1
45-64	30.0	35.6	30.5
65 and over	16.0	26.6	16.7
Total	29.3	32.5	29.5

WOMEN

Age	White	Black	Total
17-24	22.7	16.0	21.5
25-34	29.1	30.9	29.2
35-44	27.6	36.4	28.7
45-64	25.2	26.7	25.1
65 and over	12.4	8.3	12.0
Total	23.7	25.1	23.8

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(Source: Centers for Disease Control)

GRAPHIC: Photo of 1936 magazine advertisement for cigarettes (pg. 1); grspha of number of people who say they smoke, broken down by education and income (Source: Louis Harris survey for Prevention Magazine); alos by sex, race, and total (Source: Centers for Disease Control); cartoons

SUBJECT: SMOKING

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